

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

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O R 092154Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 579

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2953

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: EX-MINISTER TELLS HIS SIDE OF STORY

REF: TEGUCIGALPA (A) 2825, (B) 2600

BEGIN SUMMARY: EX-MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES, FERNANDO MONTES, TOLD POLOFF THAT HE HAD RESIGNED BECAUSE OF HIS DISAGREEMENT WITH LT. COLONEL MARIO MANDONADO, HEAD OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM INSITUTE. OTHER FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE DECISION WERE HIS LACK OF AUTHORITY AS MINISTER AND THE ATTACKS ON HIM IN CONNECTION WITH THE UNC HUNGER MARCH. HE DESCRIBED THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL AS AN IDEOLOGICALLY ANARCHIC GROUP WHICH IS INEXPERIENCED, BADLY ADVISED AND ILL INFORMED. HE SAID THAT CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR IS AN INSTRUMENT OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL AND DOES NOT HAVE AN INDEPENDENT BASE OF SUPPORT. HE IS SATISFIED THAT FATHER CASIMIRO, FATHER IVAN BETANCOURT AND TWO WOMEN WERE SHOT ON JUNE 25. END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF HAD CONVERSATION WITH EX-MINISTER OF NATURAL
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RESOURCES FERNANDO MONTES ON JULY 9. REFTTEL A REPORTED

HIS RESIGNATION ON JULY 1.

2. MONTES SAID THAT HE HAD RESIGNED BECAUSE HIS SITUATION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT HAD BECOME UNTENABLE. HE COMMENTED THAT HIS DIFFERENCES WITH LT. COLONEL MANDONADO, HEAD OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM INSTITUTE (SEE REFTEL B), HAD REACHED THE POINT WHERE IT HAD BEEN NECESSARY TO PRESENT HIS VIEWS TO THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (CSD). THE COUNCIL, ACCORDING TO MONTES HAD BEEN DISTURBED AT THE CONTROVERSY, BUT HAD DECIDED TO SUPPORT THEIR "COMRADE IN ARMS" MALDONADO. MONTES ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD BECOME INCREASINGLY DISTURBED BY THE LACK OF POWER HE HAD TO CARRY OUT HIS MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS. HE REMARKED THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAD BEEN REDUCED TO MERE AGENTS ACTING AT THE WHIM OF THE CSD. FINALLY, THE UNC(CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION OF CAMPESINOS) HUNGER MARCH LED TO A CONFRONTATION WITH THE ARMY IN OLANCHO, WHICH RESULTED IN A NUMBER OF DEATHS. ACCORDING TO MONTES (A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT), THE PRESS AND SOME MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL ATTACKED HIM FOR HIS SUPPOSED INVOLVEMENT IN THE MARCH, A CHARGE HE EMPHATICALLY DENIED. HE SAID ALL OF THESE FACTORS TOGETHER MADE HIM DECIDE THAT HE COULD NO LONGER SERVE AS MINISTER.

E. HE DESCRIBED THE CSD AS IDEOLOGICALLY ANARCHIC WITH GROUPS FORMING AND CHANGING AS DIFFERENT ISSUES ARE CALLED BEOFRE IT FOR DECISION. HE SAID THAT MOST OF THE MEMBERS ARE INEXPERIENCED, ILL INFORMED AND BADLY ADVISED. HE POINTED OUT THAT THEY OFTEN LISTENED TO THE OPINIONS OF FELLOW OFFICERS (EQUALLY UNINFORMED) AND DECIDED MATTERS ON THAT BASIS. HE SAID THAT MELGAR IS THE INSTRUMENT OF THE CSD AND IS NOT ABLE TO TAKE ANY INDEPENDENT ACTION. MONTES REMARKED THAT THE CSD HAD GRANTED MELGAR GREATER LATITUDE TO DEAL WITH THE HUNGER MARCH AND JUTICALPA INCIDENT BECAUSE CONTINUOUS DECISIONS WERE NEEDED AND THE COUNCIL WAS UNABLE TO CONTINUE IN SESSION ON A CONTINUOUS BASIS.

4. HE SAID THAT THE MILITARY HAD SPLATTERED ITSELF WITH BLOOD AS A RESULT OF ITS REPRESSION OF THE MARCH, AND HE REMARKED THAT THERE WERE MANY MORE DEAD IN OLANCHO THAN ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION, BECAUSE OF ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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TREATMENT OF CHURCH PERSONNEL THE GOVERNMENT HAD SUCCEEDED IN CREATING A CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHURCH. HE REMARKED THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TAKING THE SITUATION VERY SERIOUSLY BUT DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH CHURCH CRITICISM. IN THAT REGARD, HE SAID THAT HE WAS SATISFIED THAT FATHER CASIMIRO (A U.S. CITIZEN NAMED MICHAEL JEROME CYPHER), FATHER IVAN BETANCOURT (COLUMBIAN), RUTH GARCIA (A HONDURAN SCHOOL TEACHER) AND MARIA ELENA BOLIVAR (COMUMBIAN) HAD BEEN SHOT

ON JUNE 25. HE SAID THAT PADRE CASIMIRO HAD BEEN SHOT AT 6:00 P.M. ON JUNE 25 BY A PARTY OF SOLDIERS AND BURIED NEAR A BAKERY IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF JUTICALPA. ACCORDING TO MONTES, FATHER BETANCOURT AND THE TWO WOMEN HAD BEEN CAPTURED BY THE NATIONAL POLICE (FSP) AND TURNED OVER TO A MEL ZELAYA WHO, TOGETHER WITH SOME COMPANIONS, SHOT THEM AND BURIED THEIR BODIES NEAR ZELAYA'S SAWMILL IN THE AREA OF LEPAGUARE IN OLANCHO. HE SAID THAT HE HAD OBTAINED THIS INFORMATION FROM PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN ON THE SCENE.

5. MONTES SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS FACING AN ENCRUCIJADA (CROSSROADS) BECAUSE OF ALL THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS VERY BAD, THE CHURCH IS ENTERING INTO OPPOSITION, DISSATISFACTION HAS INCREASED AMONG THE CAMPESINOS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NO SUPPORT AND THE SITUATION WITH EL SALVADOR HAS BECOME MORE THREATENING. HE SAID THE LT. COLONELS ARE NOT THINKING ABOUT A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY AT PRESENT BUT IF THINGS CONTINUE AS THEY HAVE BEEN, THEY WILL PROBABLY BE FORCED INTO CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY.

6. COMMENT: MONTES' COMMENT ABOUT THE LACK OF POWER OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS APPEAR TO BE TRUE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SAME DAY, FONMIN GALVEZ TOLD THE REPORTING OFFICER HE HAD NOT BEEN PREVIOUSLY INFORMED ABOUT THE EL POY MEETING BETWEEN CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR AND PRESIDENT MOLINA AND HAD NOT BEEN TOLD WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE. WHEN THE MINISTERS WERE ORIGINALLY CHOSEN, THE EMBASSY HAD EVALUATED THE CABINET AS TECHNICALLY COMPETENT BUT NOT COMPOSED OF LEADERS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. AT THIS POINT, IT APPEARS THAT THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL, TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE, HAS RELEGATED THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO THE ROLE OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE BODY CHARGED WITH CARRYING OUT DEFENSE COUNCIL DECISIONS.

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